1: Childs M-5 (1924-1940) 1949 FP13 Mbundu FP13

[p. 98]

CHAPTER VI

CHILDHOOD

The Child (*onefie* or *omõlã*[1])

857 (*From the achievement of physical independence until about nine years*)

866 'If a toddling child (*omõlã ocisembe*) has finished learning to walk and expects a younger sibling, he is not carried any more and even though his mother should go to (visit) another village, he will stay behind perfectly well without crying. Now he has changed a great deal: that which he formerly did, he now no longer does.' This statement is perhaps a little optimistic, but it may be taken as sufficiently realistic and representative for practical purposes.

The child continues to see the same adults and to play with the same children as before, i.e. those of his own home village, but with two differences which the narratives will bring out. *First*, he is not now dependent to such an extent upon the elder sibling or cousin, and this independence brings the beginning of his life-long association with his age-mates. *Second*, the sex division of society begins for him at this time. From about eight years of age boys and girls will play in sex groups, and boys will begin to eat in the *onjango* with their fathers, girls continuing in the kitchen with mother and the younger siblings. The child does not go beyond the sheltering friendliness of the village except in the company of adults until toward the middle of this period of childhood. With mother or father he may often go to the fields or on excursions to neighbouring villages or to the chief's village.

861 The conscious education of the child is very much intensified from the time he achieves independence, but parents rarely realize the importance of the years from about four until about eight when little boys begin eating in the *onjango*. Theoretically the balance between the male and female sides of the house, characteristic of Umbundu social structure, is maintained in the training and education of the children. Actually what generally happens is that, until about eight, the mother and the older sibling or cross-cousin are very largely responsible for whatever is given and after that the father becomes responsible for the boys while the mother continues with the girls. This arrangement is modified somewhat by

[1] *Omõlã* is the term generally used but its primary meaning is *son* or *daughter*.

233 The cattle herd obtains most of its food by grazing, but in the dry season the grass withers. Childs states[1] that "Herding has been a [609] function of the sister's son, and even now there is a reluctance on the part of the boys to herd for their fathers."

235 462 [844] Chickens are owned and looked after by both men and women, but other animals only by men. Boys may have small stock of their own, and a boy's economic independence most frequently begins with his owning a chicken.

231 Hambly states that goats are more common than any other animal, and that every family has one or more. These animals are not fed or watered, but are allowed to wander to find their own sustenance. Goats are not milked. Young males are castrated. The goat is frequently used in sacrifices. Sheep also are allowed to find their own food; the males are not castrated. Pigs are cared for comparatively carefully, receiving water and a daily supply of sweet potatoes and their leaves, together with some corn. Male pigs are castrated.[2]

APICULTURE[3]

[439] Beeswax was an important item of trade in the caravan days, and is still sold to Portuguese traders' stores, where it is massed into large rectangular cakes for export. Honey is eaten alone or with manioc, and [747] a fermented beer called *ochasa* is made by adding honey to corn-beer. [473] Fibre strainers are used for cleaning the wax, and large shallow baskets [252] are employed for drying the honey in the sun.

Large cylindrical hives, which are private property, are placed high in the trees. These are made by removing a cylinder of bark and lashing the halves together with strands of bark, forming a hive which has a diameter of one foot.

In Elende honey is removed from the hives during the months of August and December. One man ascends the tree in order to lower the hive with a long rope of bark or plaited fibre, while beneath the tree men are prepared to take the hive, which is opened over a smoky fire.

ARTS AND CRAFTS

326 782 *Smithing.* The profession of blacksmith or *ocivinda* is an important one, and, like hunting and divining, is sacred and is entered with special ritual. Often, but not always, these three professions are passed on by inheritance. For smithing two years' apprenticeship to a member of the profession is necessary, and is usually entered upon at the age of eighteen. At the end of this period the master examines his pupil, and makes tools for him, especially the heavy hammer or *onjundo* which is regarded as symbolic of his craft. For the inauguration ceremony the boy provides four chickens (2 male, 2 female), a dog, and a goat; the blood of these animals is sprinkled on his tools, and their flesh is eaten at a feast [553] attended by the villagers. Throughout the procedure the boy remains standing on the small anvil. Finally he is asked to choose his professional name; he then steps down from the anvil a qualified blacksmith.

(1) Childs, 1949, p.109. (2) Hambly, op.cit., p.154.
(3) Hambly, (4) 1934.

time to the village of the paramount chief. These periods spent away from home continue into adolescence. Not only relatives, but also friends, blood-brothers and *vakuacisoko* (see below) exchange children in this way.

Later childhood

No definite time marks the transition from early to later childhood, but there are marked differences between the two stages. As soon as the child is physically able, he begins to assume a definite role in the community. Soon after a child gets his permanent teeth, a notch in the form of an inverted V is chipped between the two upper front incisors. Formerly the beginning of the period was marked for the boy by his first trip with a trading caravan; today a boy of this age may begin to work in the fields with his father, or begin to learn a trade, or be sent to school. A girl starts to learn field-work and housework.

Professions

A boy is expected to learn the profession or *ocipinduko* in which his father or his mother's brother is expert, and after that, should he wish to learn some other side-line profession, he may apprentice himself. All children, both boys and girls, are expected to learn to cultivate, but that is not counted as a profession. The principal *ovipinduko* (professions) listed by Childs are: for girls, basket-making, pottery-making, medical practice and divination; for boys, mat-making, wood-working, rope-making, thatching, fishing, apiculture, hunting, smithing, and medical practice and divination. The last three, as has been mentioned above, are "sacred" and entered under special conditions.

"Later childhood, then, is the period of technical training during which it is expected that a large amount of economic responsibility will be assumed. A child begins to own property even before this, and from the beginning of childhood will be accounted legally responsible for his actions. It is recognised, however, that he should not be set tasks beyond the experience or ability of his age and that the full responsibility of adulthood will come only with marriage."(1)

The coming of European commerce, industry, and government has created new types of employment for boys and men, some of which cause a prolonged absence from the village and a loosening or severing of kinship ties. There are no estimates of the number of persons employed by Europeans, or the average length of their absence from home.

ADOLESCENCE(2)

Childs found that the onset of puberty was late among the Ovimbundu, coming between fourteen and sixteen years for girls and between fifteen and seventeen years for boys. Soon after puberty young people generally stop sleeping in the parents' house. The girls congregate in kitchens and each boy builds himself a house, in which he will live through adolescence

(1) Childs, op.cit., p.118.
(2) Based on Childs, op.cit., pp.58-9 and 111-18.